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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 04 ADDIS ABABA 000311

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SUBJECT: SOMALIA: PM MELES HIGHLIGHTS LAND REFORM AS KEY TO  
CLAN RECONCILIATION AND POLITICAL STABILITY IN SOMALIA

REF: ADDIS ABABA 40

Classified By: AMBASSADOR DONALD YAMAMOTO. REASONS: 1.4 (B), (D).

¶1. (C) SUMMARY. In a 90-minute meeting on January 27 with A/S Frazer, Prime Minister Meles highlighted that Somalia's primary clans generally supported the Transitional Federal Government (TFG). Only the Hawiye/Habr-Gedir/Ayr sub-clan, the primary political base of the deposed Council of Islamic Courts (CIC), posed a potential challenge to political reconciliation. While the TFG was engaging the other clans, land ownership was the main stumbling block to reconciliation. The Ayr, the most critical clan to reconciliation in Mogadishu, had confiscated land during the Siad Barre regime, and feared initiatives to strip them of this property, Meles said. Ethiopia considered such restitution "counter-productive," and advocated compensation of former owners instead, despite opposition from President Yusuf who believed it would signal tacit approval of Hawiye confiscation of other clan's land-holdings. Due to their clan affiliations, political engagement of either impeached Parliamentary Speaker Sharif Hassan Sheikh Adan (a Rahanweyne) or CIC Executive Council Chairman Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed (an Abgaal) would not have addressed the key challenge of accommodating the Ayr. Meles hailed Yemen as the "only Arab country we can broadly trust," and identified Rwanda, Uganda, and Nigeria as the most critical potential troop contributors for an international peacekeeping mission in Somalia. While hailing the effectiveness of U.S.-Ethiopian counter-terrorism cooperation, Meles said political fallout from publicity surrounding leaked U.S. military strikes required that certain operations be "wound down." Calling for strengthening of intelligence operations in Somalia, Meles said deployment of HUMINT assets would help the long-term tracking of terrorist cells and high-value targets. (PM Meles's comments on Sudan will be reported septel.) END SUMMARY.

¶2. (U) AF A/S Jendayi Frazer met January 27 with Prime Minister Meles Zenawi, who was accompanied by Personal Assistant to the PM, Gebretensai Gebremichael, and MFA acting Director General for Europe and America Almaz Ameha. Ambassador and deputy pol-econ counselor (note-taker) accompanied A/S Frazer.

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EXCEPT FOR AYR SUB-CLAN, GENERAL SUPPORT FOR TFG

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13. (C) Underscoring the central role of clans to politics and economics of Somalia, PM Meles assessed that of the three major clans who dominated Somalia (as opposed to Somaliland), only the Hawiye/Habr-Gedir/Ayr sub-clan posed a problem:

-- The Darod (of President Abdullahi Yusuf) generally supported Somalia's Transitional Federal Government (TFG).

-- The Rahanweyn (or Digle-Mirifle) were pastoralists who, not being militarily disposed, were often subjugated by other clans, and whose farmlands had been confiscated. The Rahanweyn were thus a "swing factor" in Somali politics, allying themselves with either the Darod or Hawiye, but were not a politically significant force by themselves. No terrorists were believed to have infiltrated Rahanweyn territory around Baidoa, Meles added.

-- The Hawiye: the Hawiye's largest sub-clan, the Abgaal, were "more or less firmly behind the TFG." The Abgaal had been "instrumental" in effecting the collapse of the CIC in Mogadishu: by not only coordinating with the Ethiopian military (ENDF) and the TFG to clear CIC forces from northern Mogadishu three days prior to the Ethiopian army's advance, but also giving a political ultimatum to CIC leaders and establishing the council of 15 Mogadishu community leaders. TFG Prime Minister Ghedi was Abgaal, but was not influential, Meles said. Former warlord Mohamed Dheere's fighting against the CIC also showed evidence of Abgaal support for the TFG, he added.

14. (C) The Hawiye/Habr-Gedir sub-clan, not Abgaal and other

ADDIS ABAB 00000311 002 OF 004

Hawiye sub-clans such as the Hawadle or Murusade, posed the main problem, Meles said. Originally from central Somalia, the Habr-Gedir were not indigenous to Mogadishu, but had occupied property belonging to Darod and Abgaal, as well as prime land near the Shebelle River. Citing the role of TFG Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of the Interior Hussein Mohammed Aideed, Meles said the Hawiye/Habr-Gedir/ Saad sub-clan generally supported the TFG, but that the Hawiye/Habr-Gedir/Ayr sub-clan served as the social base of the CIC. Political reconciliation ultimately was a question of how to accommodate the Ayr sub-clan, Meles concluded.

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OPPOSING PROPERTY RESTITUTION IS AYR'S MAIN CONCERN  
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15. (C) According to Meles, Ayr leaders in Mogadishu had told Ethiopian Foreign Minister Seyoum "in no uncertain terms" that addressing the issue of property claims was critical to stability in Mogadishu and throughout Somalia. Seyoum had found the Ayr's principal concern to be fear of losing property (in southern Mogadishu and the Juba and Shebelle valleys) that the Ayr had occupied from others, principally businessmen from Somaliland, during the end of the Siad Barre regime. The Ayr were concerned about a provision in the Transitional Federal Charter calling for a commission to examine claims of land appropriation. Meles noted that CIC security chief Yusuf Siad Inda'ade had principally been a farmer/landowner controlling banana plantations with commercial ties to Italy, rather than an ideologically motivated Islamicist. Meles cited Osman Atto's (Habr-Gedir) occupation of former Aideed rival Ali Mahdi's (Abgaal) former house in southern Mogadishu as a prime example of the confiscated property that Ayr were afraid to lose.

16. (C) While Abgaal felt "robbed" by Habr-Gedir, especially by the Ayr sub-clan, Ethiopia believed restitution, although just, would be counter-productive, Meles said. Instead, the GOE supported tenants retaining control of their property, and providing compensation to former owners, particularly in urban areas. In rural areas, many occupants had since fled

Somalia, so farmland could be restored to original owners. Meles appealed for international financial assistance to provide such compensation and allow Ayr to retain their property. Meles acknowledged, however, opposition from TFG President Yusuf, who believed compensation indicated tacit approval of Hawiye confiscation of land. Accommodating the Habr-Gedir would help weaken support for CIC Islamicists and marginalize extremists, Meles countered, who said he would discuss the issue with Yusuf on the margins of the African Union Summit. A/S Frazer responded that a formula for compensation, differentiating between urban and rural areas, appeared fair, and suggested Meles exercise his leverage over Yusuf.

¶7. (C) Another Ayr concern was poor political representation within the TFG, Meles said. While President Yusuf agreed that individual Ayr reps now in the TFG may not be "adequate," Yusuf did not accept the Ayr's argument that they constituted the largest sub-group within the Hawiye/Habr-Gedir, and believed representation was an issue the Habr-Gedir had to address internally. Ethiopia had invited Ayr leaders to consultations in Addis Ababa after the AU Summit, Meles added.

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NEED TO ACCOMMODATE AYR, NOT TFG SPEAKER OR CIC CHAIR  
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¶8. (C) Ethiopia had unsuccessfully pushed TFG President Abdullahi Yusuf to delay the impeachment of Parliamentary Speaker Sharif Hassan Sheikh Adan, Meles said, adding that even Ethiopia sometimes found Yusuf "difficult" to deal with. Meles noted, however that as the Speaker was Rahanweyn but did not represent majority Rahanweyn interests, he had little political influence; his inclusion would not have significantly promoted reconciliation within Somalia. Similarly, Meles argued, engaging CIC Executive Council Chairman Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, an Abgaal, would have been fruitless, as Abgaal already supported the TFG, and he

ADDIS ABAB 00000311 003 OF 004

would not have brought any other clans on board.

¶9. (C) A/S Frazer responded that as some CIC leaders appeared to be "devoted to chaos," it was preferable to co-opt a weak Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, to prevent hard-liners from rallying around him. Ambassador Ranneberger had met him in Nairobi to urge him to renounce violence and participate in reconciliation. A/S Frazer expressed concern about reconstitution of the CIC, were Sheikh Sharif to leave Kenya for asylum in Yemen, and join CIC foreign secretary Ibrahim Addow. Political dialogue among multiple parties, within Somalia, not in Yemen or Sudan, was key. Ex-CIC leaders could participate as individuals, but not as any reconstituted form of the CIC, she said.

¶10. (C) Meles noted that EU Development Commissioner Louis Michel continued to consider inclusion of Sheikh Sharif crucial. However, while Sheikh Sharif (a Hawiye/Habr-Gedir/Abgaal) was perceived as more important than Addow, as an Ayr, Addow was more influential. Meles observed that political dialogue required participation by power-brokers such as the Ayr and traditional business leaders, not by "a front" just as the CIC. Meles noted that whereas the international community considered Sheikh Sharif a CIC leader, Somalis considered him an ex-associate of Mohammed Dheere, who had fought against the CIC. Asserting Ayr responsibility for the January 19 mortar attack on the TFG presidential villa, Meles said accommodating the Ayr would result in a "dramatic reduction" of instability within Somalia. Instability would not be eliminated, but would remain at a tolerable level.

¶11. (C) Meles affirmed the strength of bilateral ties between Ethiopia and Yemen, noting that their security chiefs had met recently in Sanaa: "The only Arab country we can broadly

trust is Yemen." In contrast, while Kenyan leaders showed political will to cooperate with Ethiopia, their "capacity to deliver is unreliable." Meles stated that he was more comfortable with Sheikh Sharif going to Yemen than remaining in Kenya, where he might be released without warning or surveillance.

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SOMALIA NEEDS SECURITY ASSISTANCE, ROADS, AND CAPACITY  
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¶12. (C) Deployment of AU peacekeepers had value and was needed "to give space and time to the TFG to sort out its political and security problems," Meles said. Ethiopia was helping the TFG train its police and reorganize its military. The police had sufficient small arms: "Weaponry is not the main problem; it's organization and skills." Even after the ENDF's withdrawal, Ethiopia would embed troops in Somali brigades now being organized, in order to build their capacity, Meles said.

¶13. (U) Meles also appealed for emergency assistance to repair roads in Somalia, to reduce time needed to travel the 350km distance to the Ethiopian border from several days to 4-6 hours, and thus spur commerce and economic stability. Ethiopia was providing technical experts to Somalia but lacked the necessary machinery.

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RWANDA, UGANDA, NIGERIA: KEY TROOP CONTRIBUTORS FOR AMISOM  
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¶14. (C) Citing USD 19 million in support for international peacekeeping in Somalia (AMISOM), A/S Frazer noted Malawi had agreed to contribute troops, and Rwanda would provide training. USG planners were working with Uganda to help it deploy immediately after the anticipated January 30 parliamentary approval. The USG had discussed possible transition to a UN peacekeeping operation with Germany, as EU president, but recognized reluctance by an overstretched UN DPKO. If political progress were sufficient, a UN mission could focus on reconstruction and development, rather than peace-making. With the UK, Norway, and Sweden, the USG was also pushing the EU to release African Peace Facility funds earmarked for peacekeeping in Somalia, despite opposition

ADDIS ABAB 00000311 004 OF 004

from Italy.

¶15. (C) A minimum of two to four thousand troops would be needed, Meles said, citing Rwanda, Uganda, and Nigeria as key troop contributors. Meles expressed great confidence in the Rwandan military, and said he would discuss the GOE's request for Rwanda to deploy with President Kagame, although President Yusuf had recently traveled to Kigali. Having a Ugandan battalion was "critical." As for Nigeria, Meles said President Obasanjo supported deployment, but his military staff did not. Asked whether Ethiopia could assist the AU Commission with mission planning, Meles said planning by individual TCCs was preferable to planning by the AU, whose role could be coordination. Uganda's military chief of staff was coordinating with the ENDF, he said.

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MEDIA LEAKS REQUIRE CURTAILING USG MILITARY STRIKES  
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¶16. (S) Despite the effectiveness of U.S.-Ethiopian counter-terrorism cooperation, political fallout from publicity surrounding leaked U.S. military strikes required that certain operations be "wound down," Meles said. The diplomatic costs of leaks to the media required that Ethiopia "forgo" the benefits of such cooperation. Deployment of HUMINT assets on the ground would compensate for the resulting lack of precision, and would also help the long-term tracking of terrorist cells, he said. Engagement

of high-value targets may require waiting until "clutter" had been removed. Intelligence operations in Somalia needed to be strengthened: Sudan had sought greater intelligence cooperation with Somalia, but had been told to focus on provision of equipment, Meles added. A/S Frazer concluded by noting that the USG was reviewing the PM's January 4 request for food aid (reftel), and had made it a priority.

¶17. (U) PM Meles's observations on Darfur, the prospects for southern Sudan, and President Bashir's candidacy for AU Assembly Chair will be reported septel.

¶18. (C) COMMENT: Prime Minister Meles's extensive remarks on clan dynamics and land reform issues highlight the significance Ethiopia accords to ensuring that the TFG accommodate Ayr interests, which it views as necessary to undermine the political base of the Council of Islamic Courts. Addressing land issues comprehensively now will ensure a stable and united Somalia, thus denying a foothold by extremist elements. Foreign Minister Seyoum's consultations with Ayr sub-clan representatives in Mogadishu, and the subsequent invitation of Ayr leaders to come to Addis Ababa for further consultations, indicate the GOE's high level of political engagement to ensure that its military operation in support of the TFG, launched just one month ago, succeeds in bringing long-term political stability to Somalia. END COMMENT.

¶19. (U) A/S Frazer cleared this cable.  
YAMAMOTO